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Smart Meter Generic
Investigation
E-00000C-11-0328**Trisha A. Morgan**

From: Warren Woodward [w6345789@yahoo.com]
 Sent: Saturday, September 03, 2011 9:57 AM
 To: undisclosed recipients
 Subject: Smart Meter Fires

If this happened to you, the fact that it does not happen often would be a very small consolation indeed.

"My problem is you took a working system and made it inoperable and now I'm paying the price for it," said Phillips.

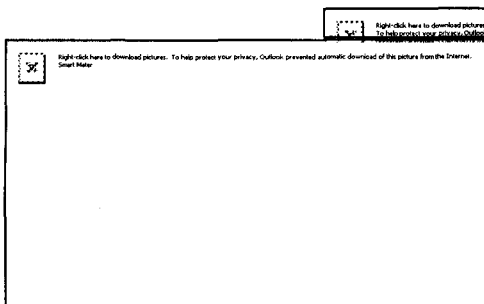
Local 2 Investigates Smart Meter Fires

By Amy Davis

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HOUSTON -- Local 2 Investigates looked into fires sparked by the installation of new smart meters on every home and business across Houston. It's a danger homeowners called us about when they were stuck with no electricity and major damage to their homes.



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Video: Local 2 Investigates Smart Meter Fires CenterPoint: Smart Meters

Charles Phillips saw smoke coming from the transformer in his backyard one morning last November. When he went out to inspect the damage, he said he saw a CenterPoint Energy contractor at his meter box with a fire extinguisher. "He told me it had caught on fire," Phillips said. "He had talked to his boss. Evidently, he told him to put it out, which is what he did."

But that was just the beginning. Inside Phillip's home, two TVs were fried, his air conditioner and garage door opener stopped working, and all of the wires and cables hooked up to his electronics were melted from the jolt his electronics took when a fire sparked after the installer removed his old meter. Phillips was left with a total of about \$2,500 in damages. "I felt that they should have some type of liability," said Phillips about CenterPoint Energy. But both CenterPoint and the subcontractor installing the smart meters across Houston said the damage is not their fault or their responsibility. "People generally don't think about that equipment being owned by them, but it's the same with the water piping inside your home, the gas piping inside your home -- it's customer-owned equipment," said CenterPoint Energy spokesman Floyd LeBlanc.

"I just don't feel like that's fair for someone to have to pay for something when the installation causes a fire," Brian Dafferner told Davis.

Dafferner had to call an electrician when a smart meter installation at one of his rental properties sparked a fire and melted all of the wiring coming from the meter box. In his case, he said the installer didn't even stick around or leave a note to let him know about the damage.

"For me, this isn't about money," said Dafferner. "It's about safety and the utilities doing the right thing."

CenterPoint's LeBlanc said the problem is mostly in older homes where wiring is not up to code or something has caused a strain on the wires running into the meter box.

"They didn't know about it," explained LeBlanc. "They couldn't have known about it."

Many times, LeBlanc said installers don't even know there will be a problem until it happens.

"My problem is you took a working system and made it inoperable and now I'm paying the price for it," said Phillips. Homeowners who have had these fires not only end up with big repair bills, they also have no electricity until they can

afford to make repairs.

"And a lot of people just don't have that money," Phillips said. "It's as simple as that."

So how often is it happening?

"I've seen five instances myself," general contractor Angelo Giokas said.

Giokas said he's been called to make repairs at five homes after smart meter fires. He wouldn't give us the exact number, but LeBlanc said CenterPoint has had far less than 100 reports of electrical fires caused during more than 1 million smart meter installations. And the power company doesn't like to use the word "fire" to describe the problem.

"When we talk about fires, we're talking about structures on fire," said LeBlanc, explaining that there have been no houses that have burned in Houston -- only electrical wiring, equipment and appliances.

"If it's charred and arching, that's a fire," said Giokas. "It could ultimately burn the house down."

North of Houston, in Arlington, Texas, it almost did. Two homes caught fire there this summer during smart meter installations.

It's exactly what Dafferner is trying to prevent.

"My concern is being able to fix the situation before someone gets hurt," he said.

So what can you do? CenterPoint said just be aware that you may have some problems. If you live in an older home and you haven't had an electrician inspect the wiring to your meter box, you might do that before your smart meter is installed.

As for Dafferner, he took CenterPoint and the subcontractor to small claims court to try and recoup the cost of his repairs. A couple of months after he filed, the subcontractor agreed to settle. It sent him a check for \$875.

<http://www.click2houston.com/news/28147128/detail.html>